

SPEECH OF MR. CALHOUN,

OF SOUTH CAROLINA,

Delivered in the Senate of the United States, on the 4th of March, 1850, on the Slavery question.

The Senate proceeded to the consideration of the special order, being the resolutions submitted by Mr. Clay, upon which this day has been assigned to the Senate from South Carolina (Mr. Calhoun).

Mr. Calhoun said, as much indisposed as I have been, Mr. President and Senators, I have felt it to be my duty to express to you my sentiments upon the great question which has agitated the country and occupied your attention. And I am under peculiar obligations to the Senate for the very courteous manner in which they have afforded me an opportunity of being heard to-day.

I had hoped that it would have been in my power during the last week to have delivered my views in relation to this all-engrossing subject, but I was prevented from doing so by being attacked by a cold which is at this time so prevalent, and which has retarded the recovery of my strength.

Acting under the advice of my friends, and apprehending that it might not be in my power to deliver my sentiments before the Senate, I intended to say, I have returned to writing what I intended to say. And, without further remark, I will ask the favor of my friend, the Senator behind me, to read it.

Mr. Mason. It affords me great pleasure to comply with the request of the honorable Senator, and to read his remarks.

The honorable gentleman then read Mr. Calhoun's remarks as follows:

Mr. Calhoun. I have, Senators, believed from the first that the agitation of the subject of slavery would, if not prevented by some timely and effective measure, end in disunion. Entertaining this opinion, I have, on all proper occasions, endeavored to call the attention of the two great parties which divide the country to adopt some measure to prevent so great a disaster, but without success. I have, however, been permitted to proceed, with almost no attempt to resist it, until it has reached a period when it can no longer be disguised or denied that the Union is in danger. You have thus far forced upon you the greatest and the gravest question that can ever come under your consideration: How can the Union be preserved?

To give a satisfactory answer to this mighty question, it is indispensable that we have an accurate and thorough knowledge of the nature and character of the cause by which the Union is endangered. Without such knowledge it is impossible to pronounce with any certainty, by what measure it can be saved; just as it would be impossible for a physician to pronounce, in the case of some dangerous disease, whether, by what remedy the patient could be cured, without familiar knowledge of the nature and character of the cause of the disease. The first question, then, presented for consideration, in the investigation I propose to make, in order to obtain such knowledge, is: What is it that has endangered the Union?

To this question there can be but one answer; that the immediate cause is the almost universal discontent which pervades all the States composing the Southern section of the Union. This widely-extended discontent is not of recent origin. It commenced with the agitation of the slavery question, and has been increasing ever since. The next question, going one step further back, is: What has caused this widely-diffused and almost universal discontent?

It is a great mistake to suppose, as is by some, that it originated with the intention of aiding their personal advancement, or with the disappointed ambition of certain politicians, who resorted to it as the means of retrieving their fortunes. On the contrary, all the great political influences of the section were arrayed against excitement, and exerted their best efforts to keep the people quiet. That is to be found in the fact that the South was divided, as in the other section, into Whigs and Democrats. The leaders and the presses of both parties in the South were very solicitous to prevent excitement and to preserve quiet; because it was seen that the effects of the former would necessarily tend to weaken, if not destroy, the political ties which united them with their respective parties in the other section. Those who know the strength of party ties will readily appreciate the immense force which this cause exerted against agitation and in favor of preserving quiet. But, as great as it was, it was not sufficiently so to prevent the wide-spread discontent which now pervades the section. No; some cause, far deeper and more powerful than the one supposed, must exist, to account for this discontent so wide and deep. The question, then, recurs: What is the cause of this discontent? It will be found in the belief of the people of the Southern States, as prevalent as the discontent itself, that they cannot remain, as things now are, consistently with honor and safety, in the Union. The next question to be considered is: What has caused this belief?

One of the causes, and one which is to be traced to the long continued agitation of the war question on the part of the North, and the many aggressions which they have made on the rights of the South during the time. I will not enumerate them all, as it will be done hereafter, in its proper place.

There is another, lying back of it, with which this is intimately connected, that may be regarded as the great and principal cause, to be found in the fact that the equilibrium between the two sections in the Government, as it stood when the constitution was ratified and the Government put in action, has been destroyed. At that time there was nearly a perfect equilibrium between the two, which afforded ample means to each to protect itself against the aggression of the other; but, as it now stands, one section has the exclusive power of controlling the Government, which leaves the other without any adequate means of protecting itself against its encroachment and oppression. To place this subject distinctly before you, I have, Senators, prepared a brief statistical statement, showing the relative weight of the two sections in the Government under the first census of 1790 and the last of 1840.

According to the former, the population of the United States, including Vermont, Kentucky, and Tennessee, which then were in their incipient condition of becoming States, but were not actually admitted, amounted to 3,929,827. Of this number the Northern States had 1,977,899, and the Southern 1,951,928, making a difference of only 25,971 in favor of the Northern States. The population of the Southern States, including Vermont, Kentucky, and Tennessee, was sixteen, of which eight, including Vermont, belonged to the Northern section, and eight, including Kentucky and Tennessee, to the Southern, making an equal division of the States between the two sections under the first census. There was a small preponderance in the House of Representatives, in favor of the Northern, owing to the fact, that, according to the provisions of the constitution, in estimating federal numbers, five slaves count but three; but it was too small to affect sensibly the perfect equilibrium, which, with that exception, existed at the time. Such was the equality of the two sections when the States composing them agreed to enter into a Federal Union. Since then, the equilibrium between them has been greatly disturbed.

According to the last census the aggregate population of the United States amounted to 17,063,357, of which the Northern section contained 9,728,930, and the Southern 7,334,427, making a difference, in round numbers, of 2,400,000. The number of States had increased from sixteen to twenty-six, making an addition of ten States. In the mean time the position of Delaware had become doubtful as to which section she properly belongs. Considering her neutral, the Northern States will have thirteen and the Southern States twelve; making a difference in the Senate of two Senators in favor of the former. According to the apportionment under the census of 1840, there were 223 members of the House of Representatives, of which the Northern States had 135 and the Southern 88, making a difference in favor of the former in the House of Representatives of 48. The difference in the Senate of two members, added to this, gives to the North in the electoral college a majority of 50. Since the census of 1840 four States have been added to the Union: Iowa, Wisconsin, Florida, and Texas. These leave the difference in the Senate as it stood when the census was taken; but add two to the side of the North in the House, making the present majority in the House in its favor 50, and in the electoral college 52.

The result of the whole is to give the Northern section a preponderance in every part of the Government, and thereby concentrate in it the two elements which constitute the Federal Government—a majority of States and a majority of their population, estimated in federal numbers. Whatever section concentrates the two in itself possesses the control of the entire Government.

But we are just at the close of the sixth decade, and the commencement of the seventh. The census

is to be taken this year, which must add greatly to the decided preponderance of the North in the House of Representatives and in the electoral college. The prospect is, also, that a great increase will be added to the preponderance of the North during the period of the decay by the addition of new States. Two Territories, Oregon and Minnesota, are already in progress, and strenuous efforts are making to bring in three additional States from the territory recently conquered from Mexico; which, if successful, will add three other States in a short time to the Northern section, making five States; and increasing the present number of States from fifteen to twenty, and of its Senators from thirty to forty. On the contrary, there is not a single Territory in progress in the Southern section, and no certainty that any additional State will be added to it during the decade. The prospect then is, that the two sections in the Senate, should the efforts now made to exclude the South from the newly-acquired Territories succeed, will stand, before the end of the decade, twenty and twenty, before the end of the decade, twenty and twenty, and forty Northern Senators to twenty-eight Southern. This great increase of Senators, added to the great increase of members of the House of Representatives and the electoral college on the part of the North, which must take place under the next decade, will effectually and irretrievably destroy the equilibrium which existed when the Government commenced.

Had this destruction been the operation of time, without the interference of Government, the South would have had no reason to complain; but such was not the fact. It was caused by the legislation of this Government, which was appointed as the common agent of all. The legislation by which it has been effected may be classed under three heads. The first is, that series of acts by which the South has been excluded from the territory recently conquered from Mexico, and which have had the effect of extending vastly the portion allotted to the Northern section, and restricting within narrow limits the portion left the South; the next consists in adopting a system of revenue and disbursements, by which an undue proportion of the burden of taxation has been imposed on the South, and the proportion of its proceeds appropriated to the North; and the last a system of political measures by which the original character of the Government has been radically changed. I propose to bestow upon each of these, in the order they stand, a few remarks, with the view of showing that it is owing to the action of this Government that the whole powers of the system centered in a sectional measure.

The first of the series of acts by which the South was deprived of its due share of the territories, originated with the Confederacy, which preceded the existence of this Government. It is to be found in the provision of the ordinance of 1787. Its effect was to exclude the South entirely from that vast and fertile region which lies between the Ohio and the Mississippi rivers, now embracing five States and one Territory. The next of the series is the Missouri compromise, which excluded the South from that large portion of Louisiana which lies north of 36° 30', excepting what is included in the State of Missouri. The last of the series excluded the South from the whole of the Oregon Territory. All these, in the language of the day, were called "free soil" articles, and were not free soil; that is, territories belonging to slaveholding powers, and open to the emigration of masters with their slaves. By these several acts, the South was excluded from 1,339,025 square miles, an extent of country considerably exceeding the entire valley of the Mississippi. To the South was left the portion of the Territory of Louisiana lying south of the 36° 30' line, and the Territory of Arkansas; and the territory lying west of the latter and south of 36° 30', called the Indian country. These, with the Territory of Florida, now the State, makes in the whole 283,503 square miles. To this must be added the territory acquired with Texas. If the whole should be added to the Southern section, it would make an increase of 80,000, which would be a large part of Texas is still in contest between the two sections, which leaves it uncertain what will be the real extent of the portion of territory that may be left to the South.

I have not included the territory recently acquired by the treaty with Mexico. The North is making the most strenuous efforts to appropriate the whole to herself, by excluding the South from every foot of it. If she should succeed, it will add to that from which the South has already been excluded 526,078 square miles, and would increase the whole which the North has appropriated to herself to 1,761,023, not including the portion that she may succeed in excluding us from in Texas. To sum up the whole, the United States, since they declared their independence, have acquired by excluding the South from territory, from which the North will have excluded the South, if she should succeed in monopolizing the newly-acquired territories, from about three-fourths of the whole, leaving to the South but one-fourth.

Such is the first and great cause that has destroyed the equilibrium between the two sections in the Government.

The second of the system of revenue and disbursements which has been adopted by the Government. It is well known that the Government has derived its revenue mainly from duties on imports. I shall not undertake to show that such duties must necessarily fall mainly on the exporting States, and that the South, as the great exporting portion of the Union, has in reality paid vastly more than her due proportion of the revenue, because I deem it unnecessary, as the subject has on so many occasions been fully discussed. Nor shall I, for the same reason, undertake to show that a far greater portion of the revenue has been disbursed at the North than its due share, and that the joint effect of these causes has been to transfer a vast amount from South to North, which, under an equal system of duties, would not have been the case. It is to be noted, however, that many of the duties were imposed, not for revenue, but for protection; that is, intended to put money, not in the treasury, but directly into the pockets of the manufacturers, some conception may be formed of the immense amount which, in the long course of sixty years, has been transferred from South to North, and thus put into the hands of the Northern States, with almost certain certainty; but it is safe to say that it amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars. Under the most moderate estimate, it would be sufficient to add greatly to the wealth of the North, and thus greatly increase her population by attracting emigration from all quarters to that section.

This, combined with the great primary cause, amplified by the second, has had the effect of concentrating over every department of the Government by its disproportionate increase of population and States. The former, as has been shown, has increased in fifty years 2,400,000 over that of the South. This increase of population, during so long a period, is satisfactorily accounted for by the number of emigrants, and the increase of their descendants, which have been attracted to the North, and thus put into the hands of the Northern States, with almost certain certainty; but it is safe to say that it amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars. Under the most moderate estimate, it would be sufficient to add greatly to the wealth of the North, and thus greatly increase her population by attracting emigration from all quarters to that section.

As for myself, I believed, at that early period, if the North got up and put into motion the machinery of getting Congress to take jurisdiction, that agitation would follow, and that it would, in the end, if not arrested, destroy the Union. I then so expressed myself in debate, and called upon both parties to take ground against assuming jurisdiction, but in vain. Had my voice been heeded, and had Congress refused to take jurisdiction, by the united voice of all parties, the North would not have been able to proceed, and the fanatical zeal that gives impulse to the agitation, and which has brought us to our present perilous condition, would have become extinguished from the want of something to feed the flames. That was the time for the North to show her devotion to the Union; but unfortunately both of the great parties of that section were intent on obtaining or retaining party preponderancy, that all other considerations were overlooked or forgotten.

What has since followed are but the natural consequences. With the success of their first movement, this small fanatical party began to acquire strength; and with that to become an object of courtship to both the great parties. The necessary consequence was a further increase of power, and a gradual taking of their doctrines, until the infection has extended over both; and the great mass of the population of the North who, whatever may be their opinion of the original abolition party, which still preserves its distinctive organization, hardly ever fall, when it comes to setting, to co-operate in carrying out its measures, or to the sphere of their action. In a short time after the commencement of their first movement, they had acquired sufficient influence to induce the Legislatures of most of the Northern States to pass acts which in effect abrogated the provision of the constitution that provides for the delivery of fugitive slaves. Not only so, but they followed to abolish slavery in their States, and to demand that the Federal Government should have exclusive power of legislation. This was followed by petitions and resolutions of Legislatures of the Northern States and popular meetings, to exclude the Southern States from all Territories acquired or to be acquired, and to prevent the admission of any State hereafter into the Union which, by its constitution, does not prohibit slavery.

It also claims the right to resort to force to maintain whatever power she claims, against all opposition, is equally certain. Indeed it is apparent, from what we daily hear, that this has been the prevailing and the most dangerous policy of the community. Now, I ask, what limitation can possibly be placed upon the powers of a Government claiming and exercising such rights? And, if none can be, how can the separate Governments of the States maintain and protect powers reserved to them by the constitution, or the people of the several States maintain those which are reserved to them, and among others, the sovereign power by which they ordained and established, not only their separate State constitutions and Governments, but also the constitution and Government of the United States? But, if they have no constitutional means of maintaining them against the right claimed by this Government it necessarily follows that they hold them at pleasure and discretion, and that at the pleasure of the North, the sovereign power by which they ordained and established, not only their separate State constitutions and Governments, but also the constitution and Government of the United States? But, if they have no constitutional means of maintaining them against the right claimed by this Government it necessarily follows that they hold them at pleasure and discretion, and that at the pleasure of the North, the sovereign power by which they ordained and established, not only their separate State constitutions and Governments, but also the constitution and Government of the United States? 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